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SUBJECT: Serbia: Bulgarian DCM Say Serbs Don't Cooperate on Energy

REFTEL: Belgrade 26

1. (SBU) On January 17, the DCM met with her Bulgarian counterpart, Plamen Atanasov, to discuss energy issues and Gazprom. Atanasov said that he had approached Serbian Energy Minister Popovic in the past to discuss sharing information or cooperating in the negotiation process with Gazprom over the South Stream pipeline. Popovic had responded that Serbia's efforts were a matter of national security, and that he was not interested in sharing information.

2. (SBU) The DCM encouraged Atanasov to continue sharing with Serbian officials Bulgaria's historical experience in dealings with Russia, especially with regard to energy. Atanasov responded that he had been involved with pipeline and energy issues for many years and had worked closely with the United States. He recalled during an earlier posting in Greece during the late-90's he had worked with Ambassador Burns on energy pipeline issues.

Comment

3. (SBU) The Serbian Government's unwillingness to share information and strengthen their negotiating position on the with Gazprom on pipelines and the possible sale of oil firm NIS is telling. Minister Popovic continues to be disingenuous in discussions with the Embassy, and his unwillingness to work with Bulgaria to maximize their leverage with Gazprom indicates how sensitive the Russian relationship is for some political forces in Belgrade. End Comment.

MUNTER